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AUTHOR	Stout, Jerry B.
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ABSTRACT

Major benefits are to be derived from the establishment of a middle echelon agency functioning as a link between the State department of education and local school districts. Such an intermediate unit is the ideal agency not only to provide services in high cost, low pupil incidence areas, but also to be the needed change agent for education. It is locally based so that it can assess and meet the needs of individual students, but it is also far enough away from the constraints faced by school districts to foresee the need for change and to implement that change. It should and can involve local personnel at all levels -- planning, implementation and evaluation -- for it is impossible to be an effective change agent without careful planning and development. This service unit can also conduct workshops in the application of new planning technologies; support the development of computerized management information systems; assess educational needs at the regional and State levels; coordinate local and State planning efforts; and identify and utilize all funding sources applicable to educational planning. (Author/WM)

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SPEAKER: Jerry B. Stout, Superintendent, Muscatine-Scott County School System, Davenport, Iowa

TOPIC: THE INTERMEDIATE UNIT AS A CHANGE AGENT

PLACE: Room 404, Civic Auditorium

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PROGRAM; Page 73

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In the September 1967 report entitled "The Multi-County Regional Educational Service Agency in Iowa," Dr. E. Robert Stephens, discussed the major benefits to be derived from an Intermediate Unit, Regional Educational Service Agency, Educational Resource Center or whatever name you wish to call a middle echelon agency functioning as a link between the State Department of Public Instruction and the local school districts, and providing needed services for those local school districts. He outlined the major benefits deriving from an Intermediate Unit as follows:

1. Protect and promote local control and local determination in public education.

2. Equalize and extend educational opportunities.

3. Assure economical and efficient operation of many educational programs.

4. Improve the quality of many educational programs.

5. Provide a needed change agent in education.

6. Promote the restructuring of school government consistent with developments in the public and private sectors.

7. Improve the coordination of local, regional and statewide educational planning.

Today I want to focus on the outlined major benefit Number 5, Provide a Needed Change Agent in Education. Let me quote directly from Dr. Stephen's report. "A state school system is in need of a unit which is free from the inhibiting restrictions which accompany an organization with narrow focus,a unit which is free from the inadequacies of finance, personnel, and time and free from the encumbrances of custom which impede innovative effort.

"So, too, is education in desperate need of a structured, systematic vehicle to implement change. This will require among other things a planned means whereby an organizational unit in the state system of education is in both a strategic position and is capable of assessing and evaluating developments in all sectors of society and

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at the same time is flexible enough to adapt its program to needed change. Local school district officials by the very nature of the organization they administer, must devote a disproportionate amount of time and energy to maintaining the organization. A state education agency tends to be similarly restricted. It appears that the Intermediate Unit has the necessary organizational features to play a significant role in promoting change in the state system of education."

Dr. Stephens goes on to discuss the elements in an educational institution which tend to inhibit change. He includes traditionalism, accepting the status quo, educational bureaucracy, insufficient financial resources, insufficient number of quality personnel, insufficient time, and community apathy or resistance. We all realize that we cannot guarantee that an Intermediate Unit can overcome these elements and serve as a needed change agent but once again quoting from Dr. Stephens, "however, it appears that the structural organization of these units as envisioned in this report can do much to minimize many of the elements which are known to inhibit change."

Let me emphasize that the Intermediate Unit is in a strategic position to help bring about change but it can also be susceptible to many of the same elements that inhibit change in a local school district. If, however, we guard against traditionalism, bureaucracy, et cetera, the Intermediate Units are capable of assessing and evaluating developments, they are flexible enough to adapt to change as it is needed, and certainly they usually don't have as much community pressure group resistance as a local school district does.

As Intermediate Units develop, they are regional in scope and hopefully, have as a major purpose the provision of services as needed for the children of the local school districts. As far as regionalism is concerned, the trends in both private and public sector, especially for planning and development, are toward a regional basis. All of you can give many examples of the growth of regionalism. In mental health, social services, conservation, flood control, metropolitan planning, highway improvement and on and on. An Intermediate Unit is in step with the times, then, as most of them are regional in basis, larger than the population and geographic base of a local school district, but maller than a state school system.

Former President John F. Kennedy stated "Change is the law of life and those who look only to the past are certain to miss the future." An Intermediate Unit must be led and staffed by personnel who are willing to look toward the future. Acting as a change agent isn't always easy. As John W. Gardner said, "New ways threaten the old, and those who are wedded to the old may prove highly intolerant. Our affection is generally reserved for innovators long dead." As innovators in the Intermediate Unit try to bring about needed change, they may find that hostility and resistance is their reward instead of affection. Nevertheless, change does take place in education. To illustrate let me read from an actual 1927 teacher's contract:

> "I promise to take a vital interest in all phases of Sunday School work, donating of my time, service, and money without stint for the uplift and benefit of the community.
>
> I promise to abstain from all dancing, immodest dressing, and any other conduct unbecoming a teacher and a lady.

I promise not to go out with any young men except insofar as it may be necessary to stimulate my Sunday School work.

I promise not to fall in love, to become engaged, or secretly married.

I promise not to encourage or tolerate the least familiarity on the part of my boy pupils.

I promise to sleep at least eight hours at night, to eat carefully, and to take every precaution to keep in the best of health and spirits in order that I may be better able to render efficient service to my pupils.

I promise to remember that I owe duty to the townspeople who are paying me my wages, that I owe respect to the school board and superintendent that hired me, and that I shall consider myself at all times the willing servant of the schoolboard and the townspeople."

How can the Intermediate Unit act as a change agent? How can it bring about change? We can immediately recall to mind such things as experimentation, pilot projects, field studies, disseminating results of the foregoing, providing supportive consultative services to local school districts as they try new things, planning and providing inservice education for local school district personnel (including board members, parents, students, and anyone in the communities affected by change). Most importantly, the Intermediate Unit, if it is to be a successful change agent, must be facilitated through research and development, planning and coordinating efforts.

Personnel in the Intermediate Unit must regard themselves as equal partners with local school district personnel. The Intermediate Unit must give local personnel continuous support and service because the changes trying to be affected, normally will be at the local district level. The Intermediate Unit personnel must be accessible constantly to local school district personnel trying to affect change. Too many times we have tried to give inspiration and left local school districts alone to affect the direct changes. These one-shot approaches are seldom successful. The motivation of demonstration, speech, or written report soon dwindles if our busy local school personnel are not supported by continuous efforts of those knowledgeable about the change trying to be affected and willing to devote time and effort in helping bring about that change.

I think the Intermediate Unit must have as one of its purposes, the ideal of strengthening our local school districts,not dominating them. The Intermediate Unit must keep in mind constantly that it is trying to meet the needs of the local school districts and the children therein. It must not encroach upon local control nor place its own organizational needs above the needs of students in the local school district.

Therefore, Intermediate Units should not be standardized. They should not all be alike. The Intermediate Unit must meet the needs of the region it is serving. In

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many of the cases these needs will vary within the region. Each Intermediate Unit is likely to have school districts with varying cultural, social and attitudinal make-ups and therefore, of course, varying needs of the student populations.

Intermediate Unit personnel must remember that the instructional function is the heart of public education. Therefore, the majority of the efforts of the service unit should be supportive to local personnel in strengthening the instructional function. This does not mean that we need to ignore administrative functions. Certainly many of our local school districts need help in changing those functions also. But administrative functions are important only as they are facilitative to the instructional function.

One other warning--because of the regional nature of Intermediate Units, efforts must be directed to overcoming the geographic and distance barriers in providing services to local schools. Personnel of the Intermediate Unit, as I stated before, must constantly be accessible. Geographic and distance barriers can be overcome by locating satellite offices throughout the districts, providing delivery systems to the local school districts from the Intermediate Unit central office, housing personnel within the facilities of the local school districts, and always striving to improve a two-way communication between local district and Intermediate Unit district personnel.

Because the Intermediate Unit personnel are not always subject to the same amount and kind of pressures local districts receive from parents, interested taxpayers, students, et cetera, they often are impatient in attempting to bring about change. Though in today's world we expect rapid change, when you are working on a specific project, sometimes change seems to come slowly. My only advice to the Intermediate Units in this case is the words of a Chinese proverb, "Even the journey of a thousand miles must begin with one pace." Therefore, do not be disheartened. When the attempt to bring about a specific change seems to be a long journey, we must still take that first step. And then another, and another, and another, until the job is complete.

Texas is a state that has recognized the need for utilizing the Intermediate Unit as a change agent. They have also recognized that regional education is facilitated through research and development, planning and coordinative efforts. In setting up the Texas Regional Educational Service Centers, the March 1967 law reads, "To provide educational services to school districts and to coordinate educational planning in the region." One of the functions of the Texas Regional Education Service Center is spelled out: "to coordinate and encourage development of projects funded under Title III of ESEA."

Well, as we look at the national scene today, this may not seem apropos as money for any Title of ESEA is at best very tenuous. However, Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was designed to encourage innovative and exemplary projects for the improvement of education. The Texas legislators evidently recognized that the Texas Regional Educational Service Centers should be designed to pilot innovative ideas.

In that same Texas law, another function is pointed out: "to provide a local oriented base for regional and statewide educational planning." Once again, the Texas legislators recognized the need for the Intermediate Unit to have the capacity to deal with

change. Notice also that this function emphasizes a point I made earlier, that though the Intermediate Unit is regional, its services must be locally oriented.

I don't know whether we have any Texas administrators in the audience but the written reports that I have seen indicate that the Regional Education Service Center started in 1965 at Texas have developed since the fall of 1967 into centers that both provide educational services and do coordinate educational planning in their region. Dr. John E. Uxer, Executive Director of Region 19 Education Service Center in El Paso and on our panel, shared some of his developments with me recently at a meeting in Springfield, Illinois. John's Region 19 Center just recently moved into a new building in El Paso, Texas. I would like to quote from Dr. Uxer's newsletter called Sunspot. "Although responsive to the expectations and wishes of the State Department of Education, the Education Service Centers are not branch offices. They are independent and regionally controlled agencies that respond to the needs and wishes of the local school districts, an original decision made by the State Board of Education. Services offered by centers vary from region to region." Then, under the title of Services of Education Service Centers, John's newsletter reveals: "Region 19 offers services across a wide range of topics that include educational media projection, lending and equipment repairing, educational planning, services related to education of the handicapped, computer services, in-service training, guidance and counseling, occupational education, and staff and curriculum development related to school driver education, consultant services, professional library facilities, individualized instruction, and staff and curriculum related to teacher training. Additionally, Region 19 ESC attempts to not only help schools identify needs but to assist them in formulating solutions to those needs. The annual plan for providing services is based upon regional priorities expressed by the local school representatives and upon state-wide priorities drawn from the legislative enactments of the State Board of Education and statements of the Texas Commissioner of Education." I am certain that we could find many fine examples throughout the United States--in Pennsylvania, in Michigan, Oregon, New York, California, Nebraska, even my home state of Iowa--that are providing a wide variety of services and also acting as the agents of planning and change.

If you are not already acquainted with it, may I suggest that you subscribe to the new journal called Planning and Changing. It is an excellent journal for keeping up on changes that are taking place in local school districts and in planning and changing on a regional basis. I assure you that they did not ask me to solicit any subscriptions but you can order this from the Department of Educational Administration, Illinois State University, Normal, Illincis 61761, and I believe the annual subscription rate is $6.00.

In the fall of 1972 Volume Three, Number Three of Planning and Changing is an excellent article entitled Educational Planning as a Service of the Intermediate Unit, by Ralph Teeter, who is Director of Planning for Education Region IV in Texas. The article reports on a recent study about the perceptions of local district superintendents relative to planning services which may be provided by the Intermediate Service Unit. I would like to quote a few of the recommendations for Intermediate Service Unit involvement in educational planning as pointed out in the article.

1. Conduct workshops using outside consultant services when needed to train local district personnel in the application of new planning technologies to education.

2. Give full support to the computerized management information system as a means of making available a variety of information for educational planning at all levels.

3. Initiate appropriate means for the assessment of educational needs at the regional and state levels.

4. Promote the coordination of planning efforts between the local and state levels.

5. (Important in today's budget squeezes) Identify and utilize all funding sources which are applicable to educational planning. One of the other recommendations: Maintaining the status of a service oriented, non-regulatory intermediate unit. Finally, "maintain high levels of staff capability to provide assistance to local districts in the development of long-range plans, particularly in the areas of early childhood education, instructional media and their utilization, data processing, special education, and pupil appraisal."

I think these recommendations help summarize some of the points that I have tried to make in my talk. You may think that I have confused, in some places, educational planning and the Intermediate Unit as a change agent. I have tried to emphasize planning and development because I think it is impossible to be an effective change agent without careful planning and development. We must learn to assess needs, local needs, determine priorities, and then go to work in helping local school districts bring about the changes needed to meet the needs.

Intermediate Units must be based on a philosophy of providing services economically, efficiently, and effectively. Intermediate Units must have a high degree of specialization of staff and facilities. They must involve local personnel at all levels, levels of planning, implementation, and of course, especially today, we can't forget evaluation.

I am convinced that the Intermediate Unit is the ideal agency not only to provide services in high cost, low pupil incidence areas, but to be the needed change agent for education. It is locally based so that it can assess and meet the needs of individual students but it is also far enough away from the traditional constraints local school districts face to foresee the need of change and to implement that change. For the most part, Intermediate Units are not organizations with narrow focuses and inhibiting restrictions. Many Intermediate Units have a new service base so that custom and tradition does not impede innovative efforts. Now if we as Intermediate Unit district administrators can find the finances, personnel, and time necessary for change, we can help bring about change. Not change for change's sake, but change that means progress in our educational system. Adlai Stevensen said, "Progress is what happens when impossibility yields to necessity." It may seem impossible to bring about certain changes, but change in education is certainly a necessity. It has been my contention that the Intermediate Unit can most effectively, of all the agencies in education, act as a change agent.

Since I have drawn upon Texas experiences today, maybe I should end with advice from a Texas friend. He once told me, "If you haven't struck oil in the first half-hour, stop boring." And Mrs. Hubert Humphrey once told her husband after a long speech, "Hubert, a speech doesn't have to be eternal to be immortal." Therefore, I think it is best to shut-up and turn this meeting back over to mortal Tom Sommerville.

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